

Rees 1

Deaf Students
at the
University of Illinois

Kara Rees
Linda Larsen
RHET 105
May 4, 2010

Abstract

My research question is if a student wants to come to the University of Illinois instead of a school specifically for the deaf such as Gallaudet, what is done to ensure their success here? In order to answer my question, I looked at four articles from online databases and interviewed three people who were very knowledgeable about the topic. I interviewed the Deaf culture professor from the University of Illinois, a hearing and visual specialist from DRES, and the head interpreter at the University of Illinois. From these interviews, I uncovered much information that I found very useful to my research. They told me about the accommodations that the University of Illinois has for deaf students and how the program has grown rapidly over the years. They also made a lot of very good points about why students should choose to come here rather than going to a school for the Deaf. This is not to say that the student won't still run into obstacles and have difficulties communicating, because they will. I've concluded that students who are dedicated, make use of everything that is offered to them and work hard can make it possible for themselves to be just as successful as any other student attending the University of Illinois.

Introduction

Imagine the excitement that a mother must have when she finally has her baby after nine months of carrying her in her womb. She thinks she is the most perfect little creature on the planet. And then, with just a few words in just a few short minutes, the doctor breaks the mother's heart. He tells her that her little baby girl is deaf. Millions of things race through her head. How will my baby girl ever be able to communicate with me and my family and friends? How will she lead a normal life? Where will she go to school? I imagine these combined with many other questions are thought about by any hearing family who gives birth to a deaf child. On the other hand, a deaf

family having a deaf child is considered normal and they actually prefer it. Fortunately, today's society has helped to make accommodations for deaf people who need to communicate with the hearing world. While most deaf people find it easiest to just stay within the Deaf culture and Deaf world, it is necessary for others to venture out of it. My question is that if a student wants to come to the University of Illinois instead of a school specifically for the deaf such as Gallaudet, what is done here to ensure their success?

Literature Review

Before I could successfully do my research specifically pertaining to the University of Illinois, I thought it would be important to know more about the history of deaf students at different Universities, both for the deaf and normal Universities. I looked at four different academic sources who had done their own research about the same topic. "The primary focus of those involved in studying Deaf culture has been on establishing that there exist distinct Deaf and hearing worlds" (Parasnis & Fischer). A common point I found in all four of these articles had to do with hearing teachers having lower expectations for their deaf students. Ruth Ann Schomstein, a deaf ASL teacher at Bloomsburg University, said that "Every time a new concept was introduced, the teachers referred to previous lessons, severely slowing down the overall pace." She also talked about how when her own children, who were hearing, entered school, they were taught in a very different way than she was going through school being deaf. However, this was not to say that all teachers were this way. Rose Marie Tuscano, an associate professor of language and literature at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, says that the deaf students she interviewed in her research "enjoyed and appreciated the high expectations placed on them by parents and teachers." I believe that there needs to be a happy medium between the two. Because deaf students do have a harder time learning at the same rate as hearing children do, the teachers

should go slower when teaching, but they should still have high expectations for their students and push them to work hard. If this means that they need to give the students extra time and attention to improve their grades, than they should do so.

If teachers are going to have high expectations for their students, the students are going to need extra accommodations besides the extra attention. Hyde writes that "while most instructors made at least a few accommodations for deaf students, others felt that they were under no obligation to modify their instruction, believing that the provision of support services such as interpreters, note-takers and tutors met students' needs and provided them with full academic access." One group of researchers studied the experiences of deaf and hard of hearing students at a Queensland University. They found that "even with interpreting and note-taking support, deaf and hard of hearing university students receive less information from lectures and tutorials than their hearing peers...even with experienced interpreters who were familiar to the students." Students from these studies had many varying opinions on the accommodations that were offered to them. One said that, "Interpreters allowed me to take in all info that was presented. Note-taking allowed me to watch the interpreter. This allowed maximum understanding" (Hyde). Another student felt that, "Peer note-taking was never found very useful and they are always another person's version of things rather than an objective account." This leads me to believe that different students find different accommodations more helpful than others, while other students may never take advantage of any accommodations at all "simply because they are unaware of the difficulties they could face in post-secondary education institutions, where teaching and learning conditions are very different from those in secondary schools" (Hyde).

Another point that a few of the articles talked about was the importance of deaf students having a role model. Parasnis and Fischer said that, "Role models are both essential and critical."

For many deaf people that attend a hearing school, there is not many deaf professors that they identify with. These deaf students, “need mentors and role models, because the hearing world tends to have false assumptions about deaf people as a whole,” and having a successful deaf role model can show the deaf students how they’ve succeeded (Parasnis & Fischer).

Besides the educational aspect of post-secondary school, “consideration is rarely given to the fact that the student is being deprived of access to the full spectrum of life on the college campus” (Hyde). One student in Hyde’s research said that their “greatest challenge was mixing with peers and other people and trying not to remain isolated.” This was one of the big differences between schools for the deaf and Universities. Students who attended deaf schools constantly had a social life and “felt accepted by people and were always around people who loved them” (Tuscano). On the other hand, deaf students attending a normal university felt it “hard to overcome deaf stereotypes,” (Tuscano). They had a hard time communicating with other people and if they wanted to, they would sometimes have to bring their interpreter with them, which obviously wouldn’t help to make them feel like they are fitting in. “Several students said they had problems in social situations and had only a few friends” (Tuscano). This seemed to be one of the areas that deaf students would have the most problems with when attending a University with a majority hearing population.

Methods

I am a Speech and Hearing Science Major at the University of Illinois. This semester I am enrolled in the Deaf Culture class, SHS 222. After learning about the education processes that deaf children have to go through and the choices that they have to make, I was interested to learn more

about what these children did when it was time to go to what they call, “post-secondary school,” better known as college. My main question was this: If a deaf student chooses to mainstream and go to the University of Illinois instead of a school for the deaf such as Gallaudet, what is done to ensure that their experience here is just like that of any other student? Working with two other students, we conducted interviews with the Deaf Culture professor at the University of Illinois, a hearing and visual specialist from DRES, and the lady in charge of interpretation services at the University. Since I couldn’t find much specific information online or through other resources, I used these interviews as a way to find the information that was specific to University of Illinois. In the interview with the Deaf Culture teacher, “Mark,” we asked him whether he thought it was better for a deaf student to mainstream or to go to a school specifically for the deaf, what some of the obstacles they would run into here would be, and what accommodations are made or can be made for deaf students at the University of Illinois. In the interviews with “Bill” and “Tracy,” we asked them specifically about the services that DRES has to offer for deaf students.

University of Illinois vs. Gallaudet

“Bill” told us that when he first came to the University of Illinois there was only one deaf student. Can you imagine being that one deaf student at a University of about 40,000 students? The pressure would be enormous. The first question we asked all of our interviewees was if they thought it was better for deaf students to mainstream or go to a school specifically for the deaf. We got pretty much the same answer from all three, in that it depends on the individual student. If a student has gone to residential day schools all of their life, they should probably continue on that path and go to Gallaudet. On the other hand, if students feel as though they have the communication and language skills to thrive in a mainstream setting, they should go that path and choose a school such as the University of Illinois. “Bill” made a very good point in saying that the

student should also consider where they will want to work later in life. If they plan on working in the deaf world where they won't have to worry about communicating with hearing people very often, then going to the University of Illinois makes no sense. If they plan on jumping into the hearing world in a job where it is necessary to have constant communication with people who won't always know sign language, then they're better off going somewhere where they can begin to fit in in the hearing world.

Obstacles

There are obstacles inside and outside of the classroom besides the obvious problem being that they cannot hear to know what is going on. Because the population of deaf students is so low, now only twelve deaf students and thirty-five hearing-impaired, it is hard to make friends and get the full experience that other students get. As well as the fact that there is not many deaf professors who work here, so while it is possible for students to talk with their professors, it is mainly through interpreters and they do not have full access to their teachers like hearing students do. After accommodations are made for deaf students, they are able to grasp the majority of what is taught in class, but there are still some things that they struggle with. For instance, when teachers show videos in class, if they are not captioned, then it isn't possible for them to know what the video was about. There are also areas that the University still needs to work on to make the campus more accessible. The large lecture halls, such as Foellinger, are also an issue. The sound systems aren't always the best and so even when a student is only hearing-impaired and not completely deaf, they still cannot hear. Also, public events aren't always advertised far enough in advance. A lot of times people can hear things through the grapevine, but deaf people cannot.

University Accommodations

According to all of our sources, the University, for the most part, does a great job at accommodating for any and every student that requests services for being deaf. Before coming to the University, a deaf student must apply for services through DRES, where there are a variety of options available for them. They can request a note-taker in their class. “Bill” was actually the one who set this up. He made it so that if a student doesn’t know sign and would rather have it shown to them in written form, some one can come in to their class room and they type on a special software package keyboard. This rhetors the lectures word for word, so they can sit next to or behind the person who is typing it out for them and know what the professor is saying at all times. They can also request an ASL/English interpreter, not only for classes but for school related functions as well. When a student comes to the University of Illinois and knows what classes they are going to take, DRES will e-mail the professors to let them know that they are going to have a deaf student in their class. “Bill” says that most professors are pretty good about it, although he can tell that they seem a little panicky at first. They are not sure what they should do, or how they should communicate with the student, and “Bill” says that he just tells them that they need to be treated like any other student. If there is an interpreter there, they should look at the student and make them feel as though they are talking to them, and let the interpreter do their job to get the point across to the student. Some students will want extended time on tests, and occasionally the professors will fight with DRES on that and say that it is all visual, but for the most part, professors are pretty accommodating.

Students Usage of Accommodations

Deaf students at the University of Illinois, already begin with the disadvantage of not being able to hear in classes and not having full communication with everyone around them. Going to a school that offers a lot of help to these students, it only makes sense for them to take advantage of

it. “Tracy” and “Bill” tell us for the most part that this is completely true. Parents and students that are going to need services from DRES, meet with “Bill” before they choose to go to the University of Illinois. Once they are accepted, making sure that they are going to be able to succeed at the school they choose is obviously very important. Just like any other student also, they are going to want to make sure that the campus life is what they want as well. “Bill” and “Tracy” say that it depends on the student, but that if a student needs help and it’s something that they really need to succeed, then they will use the help. Of course, if it’s something that they could do without, they will try and not use it. Most times, people would rather fit in, than stick out. By having a special person come to class with a deaf student, such as an interpreter or someone to type notes for them, they are standing out more and people will look at them. Just like anyone else though, they do what they need to do in order to succeed. We asked “Tracy” if she had ever seen a student drop from the University because they didn’t have enough access or due to barriers, and she said that she had never seen this happen.

Conclusion

With more time I would have liked to interview some ASL professors along with members of the Society of Signers at the University of Illinois. I believe that the University is doing a great job at offering ways to help deaf students that want to attend here. Professors need to continue to be accommodating and help DRES out with letting them know when they will be playing videos in class so they can closed-caption them. The University should also make sure that events are more advertised and they should all be interpreted as well as have better sound systems that make it so students who are hard of hearing can sit anywhere in a room and still be able to hear with their usual assistance. Whether a student is hearing or deaf, they are always going to have difficulties

when they reach the University level, although deaf students will have more obstacles that they will run in to. However, when they utilize all of the accommodations consisting of interpreters, note-takers, special software keyboard packages, and closed captioning, they can in fact succeed at a hearing University.

WORKS CITED

- Hyde, Merv, et al. "The experiences of deaf and hard of hearing students at a Queensland University: 1985-2005." *Higher Education Research & Development* 28.1 (2009): 85-98. Academic Search Premier. EBSCO. Web. 14 April 2010.
- Parasnis, Ila, and Susan D. Fischer. "Perception of diverse educators regarding ethnic-minority deaf college students, role models, and diversity." *American Annals of the Deaf* 150.4 (2005): 343-349. Academic Search Premier. EBSCO. Web. 14 April 2010.
- Schomstein, Ruth Ann. "Teaching ASL in the University: One Teacher's Journey." *Sign Language Studies* 5.4 (2005): 398-414. Academic Search Premier. EBSCO. Web. 14 April 2010.

Tuscano, Rose Marie, Barbara McKee, and Dominique Lepoutre. "Success with academic english: reflections of deaf college students." *American Annals of the Deaf* 147.1 (2002): 5-23. Academic Search Premier. EBSCO. Web. 14 April 2010.